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Backgrounder

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SMALL FARMS REPORT

“A Time to Act” is a 120 page report of the National Commission on Small Farms which lays out a strategy to aid the survival of America’s small farms. This study is part of the Clinton Administration’s on-going efforts to address the needs of family farmers and preserve our nation’s small farm heritage.

The National Commission on Small Farms was formed by Secretary Glickman in July, 1997, and is chaired by former Congressman Harold Volkmer. The Commission was developed in response to recommendations made by the USDA Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT).

The Commission sought ways for small farmers to be more competitive through government and private initiatives, as well as the application of appropriate research. The Report specifically recommends:

- Promoting and fostering new regional markets benefiting small farmers and the rural and urban poor through a federal interagency partnership. (Rec. 3.25).
- Providing training and technical assistance to small farm operators and beginning farmers through an entrepreneurial development initiative. This effort will assist the creation of farmer owned and operated marketing enterprises. (Rec. 3.26)
- Initiating a new Beginning Farmer Development Program which creates training and assistance centers for beginning farmers in partnership with community-based nonprofits, land-grant universities, and the private sector.(Rec. 5.5 & 5.8)
- Developing a research initiative which teaches small farmers to use less capital- intensive investments, by fully utilizing their ingenuity, hard work, and the unique resources of their farms. (Rec. 1.1.)

The Commission offers suggestions to assist the living conditions of farm workers, the preservation of farmland and environmentally sensitive areas. The Report stresses the need for outreach to farmers, lenders, and educational institutions, as well as opening new avenues to credit. Also, it seeks legislation to increase crop insurance coverage and to create beginning farmer grant programs.

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In the last few months, Secretary Glickman has put into action many of the recommendations from “A Time to Act,” including:

- Developing new lending procedures through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) which substantially streamline the application process and form requirements. (Rec. 1.28)
- Fully funding direct farm ownership loans and direct farm operating loans, which is part of President Clinton’s FY 99 Budget (Rec. 7.3, 7.4, 7.8)
- Developing legislation to change the loan restrictions for small farmers on debt forgiveness (Rec. 1.24)

The work of the Commission is another important step in President Clinton’s and Secretary Glickman’s strategy to ensure the economic viability and success of our nation’s future generations of small farmers. An “Action Team” led by Deputy Secretary Rominger will begin examining methods for implementing the recommendations of the National Commission on Small Farms.

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